



LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

The voice of Louisiana's wildlife and natural resources since 1940.

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Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority
Baton Rouge, LA

Submitted to coastal@la.gov

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on behalf of Louisiana Wildlife Federation (LWF) and its 23 affiliate organizations and more than 12,000 members dedicated to the conservation of Louisiana's wildlife and natural resources.

The Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) Draft Fiscal Year 2026 Annual Plan is the largest investment to date at \$1.80 billion for fiscal year 2026, topping last year's total of \$1.68 billion. This level of investment in sustaining and protecting our coastal zone is important to the survival of south Louisiana.

We applaud the administration for continuing to focus on moving projects in the master plan from planning to construction to completion. With 133 priority projects in progress, and the 197 completed projects, Louisiana's coastal program is firmly in the construction phase and getting projects on the ground.

LWF is pleased to see the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion project is again slated for a budget of \$127 million this year, \$454 million next year, and \$574 million in fiscal year 2028. It is a crucial part of the planning and implementation for the region. Now we need to use it. But there has not been a word spoken in the past three CPRA board meetings about the status of the project and its continued construction. The ongoing construction delays are concerning.

If that budgeted money isn't spent on a project that has gone through years of scientific and engineering study, received federal approval, and broke ground in 2023, then the annual plan total amount is misleading. Louisiana Wildlife Federation urges CPRA to actually spend the money to advance this desperately needed coastal restoration and protection for the state.

In the previous annual plan, it was noted that "one of the most monumental events in the history of coastal Louisiana, the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion officially broke ground on Aug. 10, 2023." The description goes on to say, "The Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion holds the promise of multifaceted benefits, ranging from ecological rejuvenation for one of the areas most impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, to enhanced storm surge protection through a natural buffer. The project is a major piece of CPRA's long-term vision and has long been the cornerstone project of the Coastal Master Plan" approved in 2007, 2012, 2017, and 2023. The project generates jobs, mitigates economic and environmental challenges in Plaquemines Parish, and is essential for restoring the Barataria Basin, which is experiencing some of the highest rates of land loss worldwide. It's crucial that this project moves forward as designed.

Thank you for continuing to advance habitat restoration in the areas impacted by the (now closed) Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) shipping channel and the damage it caused.

For two decades, LWF has promoted support for the River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp project, which broke ground in 2024, and we are excited to see its construction continue through the coming annual plan budgets. Using mitigation dollars from the nearby West Lake Pontchartrain Levee Alignment to help fund the project is a notable programmatic decision.

There is much to be hopeful about in south Louisiana when we think and act big. Louisiana's coastal program has enjoyed widespread support and 92% of Louisianians support a comprehensive, science-driven plan to combat land loss.

Looking ahead, Louisiana has the challenge of identifying revenue for coastal restoration and protection when annual revenues drop from over \$1 billion to \$200 million in less than a decade with declining Deepwater Horizon oil spill funds. LWF stands ready to help identify and secure alternative and new funding support so that Louisiana can continue planning and implementation at a large-scale ecosystem level.

The Mississippi River built the bountiful landscape of south Louisiana. Allowing our rivers to rebuild and sustain our estuaries where we can is a cost-effective strategy over the long term. The fame of "Sportsman's Paradise" is rooted in its vast estuarine systems from the Sabine River to the Pearl River. It's worth all that is being invested for its sustainability.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Triche
Executive Director, Louisiana Wildlife Federation